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Spring 3-12-2018

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Schipull, Corinne, "A Reason to Daydream" (2018). *Honors Theses, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*. 40.
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A Reason to Daydream

A Senior Thesis Project

Corinne Schipull

In late 2016, two of my classmates approached me with an idea: what if we shot our capstone film with a crew comprised entirely of women? We did not yet have a script, but the idea of a film created by women, about women, and the chance to be a part of it intrigued me. I knew that I felt strongly about the basis of our film, and that it felt important to execute this project to the best of our ability, however I could only vaguely articulate why. Over the course of the past year, I have traded off between the creative task of producing our film and the intellectual task of researching the realities of being a woman in not only a male dominated industry, but a male dominated world. This essay explores my original motivations for this project, including the current status of women in the film industry and the workforce in general, the prevalence of sexism in our society, the historical and legal context for that sexism, and potential solutions for these problems; additionally, the events of the past year have brought these topics to the forefront of the public mind more than ever, so I discuss the context of current events as well.

My classmates and I know that soon we will graduate from the creative bubble we currently reside in and face a much more hostile world: an industry where men outnumber women five to one (Pasquine). Those women claim a scant percentage of the leadership roles in that industry. Only 9% of the directors, 15% of the writers, and an abysmal 2% of the cinematographers of the top 250 films in 2012 were women. We have better odds as producers and editors, but still only make up 25% and 20% of those roles, respectively (Lauzen). Professional women additionally tend to find themselves pitted against each other in a way that men do not. One popular contemporary example is the “feud” between rapper Cardi B, who made a splash with her song “Bodak Yellow,” and Nicki Minaj, who, according to CNN, “has been topping the charts since 2011.” Cardi’s success led to speculation as to whether she would overtake Minaj as the so-called Queen of Rap, and rumors of a feud between the two

women started to spread. According to the artists themselves, however, the feud only exists between their fans. Meanwhile, people do not seem as interested in the effects that up and coming male rappers might have on the careers of men like Jay Z or Kanye West. "It makes it seem like there can only be room for one woman to be an artist at a time in this hip-hop world," says radio host Angela Yee (Zaru). The film industry also exhibits this phenomenon, perhaps even more severely. To this day, Kathryn Bigelow remains the only woman to win the Academy Award for Best Director, and only four other women have ever received the nomination for the award (O'Neill).

Our film school has a much more balanced gender ratio than the industry itself, and my fellow producers and I recognized the rare opportunity at hand. We have extremely low chances of working on a professional crew that doesn't have mostly male leadership, at least not in the near future. When would we get a better chance to take charge? We would have to battle uphill for years to regain even a modicum of the control over our work that we have in school. Though the men in our school will also have to face the steep climb of their career ladders, they will not have the added weight of sexism to carry with them, and will mostly feel they are among their peers, at least in regards to gender, as they climb. They have better chances of receiving fair compensation for their efforts: current estimates for the gender pay gap land around 80 cents to every man's dollar, and the film industry is certainly no exception to this. Only after *Wonder Woman* dominated at the box office, becoming the highest grossing movie directed by a woman (Wright), and months of negotiation did Patty Jenkins secure a record-breaking salary for a woman director on *Wonder Woman 2*. Jenkins told *Variety*, "I've never been more aware of a duty than I was in this deal. I was extremely aware that I had to make sure I was being paid what the male equivalent would be (Setoodeh)."

My partners and I similarly felt a duty to affirm each others' abilities, to encourage each other to fulfill technical and leadership roles we might otherwise be too passive or humble to ask for, and to build camaraderie as a group of unified, capable women. We knew that we would need twice the knowledge, talent, strength, and nerve as men to overcome the additional obstacles on our paths to success: external obstacles such as unequal pay and minority status, as well as any attitudes we might have internalized to fit into a world which socializes women to behave meekly. We worried our male counterparts might feel we excluded them for no reason: our film school is small and close-knit, and generally we all welcome each other onto each others' sets. As film students we all specialize in different areas of our craft, and we each can learn a lot from each other. Truthfully, choosing not to take advantage of any of the male talent at our school was like tying one arm behind our collective back. This limitation, however, helped us to grow: just as a martial artist might tie down their dominant arm to force themselves to develop their weak side, we chose to recruit only women not as an insult to the men around us, but as a challenge for ourselves.

In my time at this school, it seems as though women tend to fulfill creative and administrative roles, like production designer and producer, while men are more often recruited for technical roles like gaffer (chief electrician in charge of lighting equipment) or camera operator. We have several women in our program who are aspiring cinematographers and would benefit greatly from those technical roles, and even those with other career paths in mind could use those experiences to round out their skill sets and make themselves more hireable, so lack of interest likely isn't the culprit of this trend. Perhaps older classmates in technical roles, consciously or unconsciously, assume the freshman women won't have a true interest in such work, and gravitate towards their fellow men to mentor. Perhaps the younger men are more assertive in seeking out a mentor. Whatever the reason, women with technical potential seem to

get overlooked. More alarmingly, these women seem to overlook themselves. They doubt their own qualifications for such jobs: even if they have taken the relevant coursework, they don't seek out the jobs because they don't wish to presume themselves as capable as a male colleague with more hands-on experience. They wouldn't be as capable without experience, of course, but how can they gain experience if such roles always go to someone else? We chose to make our film with a crew of women partially to neutralize the excuse that our lighting and camera-minded women weren't the most qualified candidates for the jobs, and to jump start their ability to gain more experience in the future. Hopefully they will use that experience to encourage and teach incoming women to pursue technical roles just as fervently as men, and create a natural gender balance in all areas of our sets.

On set, our crew did feel small compared to other thesis-level film crews, but no less capable. The art department suffered the shortage of hands the most, ironically. They needed to furnish and decorate the gas station and apartment from scratch, flip the apartment from Emily's to Grace's overnight, and refurbish an old swingset to make it not only aesthetically pleasing, but safe for children to actually play on. Our production designer did an incredible job coordinating all of this, but even with her assistants, she wished for more time to iron out the details. At one point, however, a large portion of the crew came together to lift the swingset into our professor's backyard, which of course felt very symbolic. At that moment, the crew certainly felt large enough. We received reports that it was one of the more pleasant sets that our colleagues had been on, but a lot of that likely had to do with luck. A lot can go wrong on a film set, but we had no major malfunctions or altercations. Towards the end of the shoot a slight sense of fatigue, and therefore stress, would occasionally set in among the crew and individuals, but it always passed without incident. Fatigue is common on film sets, especially student sets in which people sacrifice their weekends for long days of unpaid work. Good food

generally helps to dissipate those bad moods: our professors often stress the importance of regular meal breaks and the power of quality craft services (snacks for the crew). We made sure our set was well catered, but it also helps to have patient people who can empathize with their colleagues and understand that reacting negatively to stress, such as snapping or becoming pushy with colleagues who are likely under similar pressure, will simply cause more stress. This is not imply that men cannot handle stress, they can and do, but as I will discuss later, plenty of social norms condition women to develop a certain emotional durability: that is, to set aside their pride, their comfort, and their needs for the sake of others. Perhaps our socialization played a role in creating and protecting the atmosphere of our set, or perhaps our crew simply felt connected to our purpose and our message and that helped motivate and focus them. Regardless of the reason, we managed to wrap up ahead of schedule most days.

Our sense of purpose gave us clear themes to focus on as we developed the script: the realities too many women face, and the importance of women supporting other women, but we grappled with what to show and how to show it. How do you unpack the frustrations that result from thousands of years of systematic misogyny in less than fifteen minutes, and tie it all up nicely at the end? More importantly, how do you do it in a way that men will not dismiss or overlook it? The film focuses on some of the more dire situations that women find themselves in, such as domestic abuse and sexual harassment in the workplace. As such, the two male characters represent the worst of the worst, not men as a whole. At one point, the script contained the line, "We can't just let all the men in the world walk all over us." I advised our screenwriter against using the phrase "all men" at any point. Generalization would only provide ammunition for those who would wish to silence us, and would alienate those who would otherwise listen. Just as the men each represent a certain type of man, we modeled Grace and Emily after two different types of women: one who wishes for independence and a career and

one with more traditional desires for a family. We wanted to portray both paths as equally valid and show that they do not necessarily exist in opposition with each other. In fact, we wished to cultivate a respect for Emily and her domestic nature: the dismissive attitude people sometimes take towards homemakers and stay-at-home parents can discourage both men and women from fulfilling those essential roles.

We tried to identify key points we would need to communicate in order to reach our audience and make them empathize with the characters, such as showing specific reasons why Emily's character could not leave her abusive relationship. We also knew we needed to humanize Grace, showing her struggle to balance school while working to survive despite her best efforts, for audiences would less likely empathize with her if she came off as lazy or a brat. Because the audience sees her working hard, they can see Grace's harassment by her boss in the light that many women view those experiences: as just one more thing that she does not have the energy to deal with, and more importantly, as an attack on her self-esteem and drive to achieve her goals. Additionally, showing her in her own space, dressed in sweats, helped us paint the picture of everyday womanhood. We ended up cutting many small moments like that for the sake of focusing the plot and the pacing of the film, but we felt it important to show the ways that real women behave when they can escape the male and public gazes, as men often do not realize how much they do not see in regards to womanhood, and can form distorted or clouded perceptions of what we do and how we behave when we're alone. Showing these moments on screen reinforces the concept that women are complete and dynamic beings, regardless of how people view us or how we present ourselves to the world. Despite our best efforts, some might still interpret the film simply as an emotional rant by a group of girls with chips on their shoulders, and that interpretation would hold some truth. We *are* angry. While fictionalized, the story does channel some of our own experiences, our own exhaustion, and our

own pain from seeing women we know and care for in situations not so unlike the ones Grace and Emily find themselves in. There is no gentle way to illustrate any of that, especially to someone who does not wish to see it.

Regardless of whether or not the pathos of our film carries to its audience, statistics and the growing national conversation about the treatment of women in our society support our motivations to create it. During a screening of a rough cut of our film, our professor noted the timeliness of our message. He referred to the notorious Harvey Weinstein story which broke on October 5th (Kantor), and served as a fatal crack in a dam which has withheld the truths of countless women for years. A tidal wave in the form of the #MeToo movement burst forth in retaliation to the story that proved to be just one story too many. The movement yielded 12 million posts on facebook within its first 24 hours (Smartt), and shined a spotlight on a problem which many still choose to ignore. It elevated the conversation beyond the topic of sexual harassment in the entertainment industry alone, and expanded it to include all workplaces and the treatment of women in general. Indeed, we could not have planned the timing any better, but any timeliness is purely coincidental. We never imagined that a good time to bring up these issues would present itself, for in truth, the discussion is not new in the slightest: only the overall public consciousness of it has changed. The current sensationalism in the media only broadcasts what women have known for decades, centuries, and millennia.

Despite the media's focus on the entertainment industry, workplace harassment affects our entire society: 27% of women report experiencing it (Lee). 54% of women report experiencing "unwanted and inappropriate sexual advances from men," in general, with 30% of those experiences taking place at work, usually from someone who had power over their career or current job (Langer). The stories of harassment in the workplace often include superiors dangling networking opportunities as bait to lure women into vulnerable situations. When the

women turn them down, the men begin to treat them poorly at work and effectively undermine their careers. Many women switch jobs, often accepting lower status or pay, to escape such environments. Not all harassment is sexual however (Ursue). Equal employment laws explicitly forbid repeated behaviors which create a hostile work environment and jeopardize a person's ability to keep and/or perform their jobs ("Harassment"). Still, sexual harassment has a particular sting to it. One woman explains that the sexual acts themselves are not the worst part: after all, many of us experience things like street harassment as a fact of life. Sexual harassment in the workplace, however, does not come from strangers, it comes from people that we thought had respect for us and our professional skills. When a woman experiences sexual harassment from a professional colleague, she begins to question those skills, or rather, question of she will ever truly be valued and regarded solely in the context of her skills, and not of her body. "It's not that we're horrified like some Victorian damsel; it's that we're horrified like a woman in 2017 who briefly believed she was equal to her male peers but has just been reminded that she is not, who has suddenly had her comparative powerlessness revealed to her (Ursue)."

Unfortunately harassment contributes only drops in the bucket of the sexual and physical abuse of women. Roughly 1 in 4 women have experienced rape or attempted rape in their lifetimes (Buchwald), while injuries from domestic violence make up 20% of all hospital visits by women (Kosof). 52% of women say they know at least one rape victim, while 4% know more than one. Those figures only include women who are aware of it: rape rates would indicate they should be much higher. Most people do not even realize that they personally know a rape victim, or a victim of any serious assault, for that matter (Gordon). The rape, abuse, and harassment rates themselves likely fall short of the truth. In 1991, the FBI's Uniform Crime report, which only consists of confirmed rapes reported to the police, listed 106,593 cases. The National Crime Victimization Survey, which interviews households, reported over 60,000 more

cases. In a private survey, only 16% of women who anonymously identified as victims of rape said that they reported the crime to the police (Buchwald). These crimes usually occur in private by the design of the perpetrator. With no witnesses to back up either side's story, we get so-called "he said, she said" cases. Victims know they don't have the proof they need, so they don't report the crimes to spare themselves any additional agony and shame (Kosof). Of course men experience domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and rape as well, and those men deserve attention, sympathy, and justice as much as any woman victim, but too often people will bring this up simply to remove gender politics from the conversation. Male rape victims suffer from the same gender dynamics that women do, just in a reversed fashion: for example, the ideas that men always want sex or can fight off an attacker lead some people to believe that men cannot suffer from rape (LeTrent). Furthermore, when only 1 in 71 men are reported rape victims, giving them a roughly 2% chance of experiencing rape as opposed to women's 25% ("Sexual Violence"), it becomes a bit ludicrous to suggest that the issue of rape and sexual misconduct has absolutely nothing to do with gender.

When yet another story broke in mid-January of 2018, this time targeting comedian Aziz Ansari, it prompted a rebuttal that the #MeToo movement had officially gone too far. The article described a date in which Ansari repeatedly insisted, but did not actually force, a woman to engage with him sexually. According to the anonymous woman, referred to in the story as Grace, she rebuffed Ansari's advances multiple times, both verbally and nonverbally, saying things like, "I don't want to feel forced," and freezing up whenever he did something she didn't like. Ansari maintains that he perceived their activities as consensual, but does not deny anything in the article (Way). Women readily complained of the prevalence of such dates, while some men, as well as women, insisted that Grace should simply have left if she truly felt uncomfortable. *The Washington Post* pointed out the vast ocean of difference between the

Ansari story and the ones like Weinstein's: it lacked the career-driven power dynamic, and Ansari did not technically behave violently or illegally. Sonny Bunch, the author of the Post's article, scoffs at the level of attention the Ansari story has gotten, writing that "bad dates — including terrible ones that leave one person feeling humiliated — aren't actually newsworthy, even when they happen to famous people."

Frankly, this view misses the point of the story entirely. Though Way's article has a definite bias and casual tone, it still depicts a profound reality that resonates with far too many women. Even assuming that Grace did publish her story for superficial reasons, the story still sparked an important conversation about the so-called "gray area" between consensual sex and assault, in which two people like each other, but one doesn't necessarily want to have sex yet. Too often when women find themselves in this gray area, they attempt to assert their boundaries, only to have men treat those boundaries as mere suggestions or obstacles to overcome. Shortly before the release of the Weinstein story and long before the Ansari story, the animated series *Big Mouth*, which comedically addresses the issues and insecurities that adolescents face as they go through puberty and begin dating, chose to approach this problem of consent in an episode called "The Head Push." It's exactly as it sounds: in the episode, a boy pushes a girl's head down while they kiss as crude way of asking for oral sex, and repeats the action despite the girl's physical and verbal indication that she has no interest in that. As she leaves the room, he admonishes her for leading him on and accuses her of resisting her own sexual liberation. When she tells her peers about the incident, the head pusher defends himself: "All I wanted was a blow job at a highschool party, is that such a crime?" The girl's peers thankfully stick by her and hold the head pusher accountable for his disrespectful actions, prompting him to leave the party. Do Ansari or the head pusher deserve jail time, or to have their careers and futures destroyed? Perhaps not, but does that make their behavior

acceptable? Comedian Samantha Bee responded to the backlash to the Ansari story in her usual cutting fashion on her show, *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*: “We know the difference between a rapist, a harasser, and an Aziz Ansari. That doesn’t mean we have to be happy about any of them.” Violent crime aside, stories like Ansari’s show that even the consensual sexual dynamic between men and women is often lopsided and dysfunctional, and if a man cannot respect a woman’s boundaries in his personal life, it makes sense that those attitudes would negatively affect his professional female colleagues as well.

“In a world where women are co-equal partners in sexual pleasure, of course it makes sense to expect that a woman would leave the moment something was done to her that she didn’t like. That is not the world we live in (Loofbourow).” In an ideal world, we would all behave like the girl in *Big Mouth*. We would immediately cease to give a man, or any person, any more chances the moment they choose to ignore our physical and verbal communication. We would let illogical, sexist insults roll off our backs as we returned to the safety of our peers. We would tell those peers what happened right away, and they would offer us support. Many of us believe in our sense of agency in theory, but in practice many women find themselves falling short. Real women suffer from self-doubt, and fear for their safety, and are generally flawed as all humans are. They do not always report the transgressions against them, because real peers do not always believe or sympathize with them, and they retroactively blame themselves for allowing those transgressions to occur in the first place.

Young women grow up believing the myth that they will invariably feel pain when they lose their virginity. Even in everyday life, completely outside any sexual context, conventionally attractive clothing for women often includes high heels, tight bras with potentially sharp wires, and “waist trainers” which are really just modern corsets. When a woman undergoes a rigorous beauty routine, removing any trace of body hair from the eyebrows down and applying a full

face of makeup daily, we simply expect it, but if she decides to let her leg hair grow naturally, she's either sloppy or making some sort of statement. From puberty onward, we receive the message that "beauty is pain," which becomes particularly insidious when coupled with the concept of beauty as an intrinsic part of femininity. Even medical practitioners seem to view female pain as a fact of life, or believe that women exaggerate their pain. On average, a woman with endometriosis will experience symptoms and seek medical care for over 9 years before a doctor properly diagnoses her. At this point, the damage done by the disease causes her daily pain (Loofbourow).

While women find themselves constantly bombarded by messages from beauty campaigns, men receive an endless selection of abusive male role models in the media and popular culture. Bancroft brings up the fact that Eminem won a Grammy for an album which contained the song "Kim," in which he describes abusing and murdering his wife, and ponders what that says about our attitudes as a society. Music and cinema are rife with depictions of the abuse of women, even in media supposedly directed at women. Romantic comedies tend to present relentless persistence and blatant disregard for the woman's wishes as endearing signs of dedication from a man, when in reality such behaviors raise red flags that a man may become abusive (Bancroft). In a culture overrun with such narratives, neither men or women have much of a reference for what a healthy relationship looks like. "The air in such an atmosphere is unfit for girls to breathe, unhealthy and depressing. It's not surprising that a number of studies have shown that the self-esteem of girls plummets when they reach adolescence (Buchwald)."

With all these things considered, is it any wonder that women have become accustomed to simply enduring their pain? We should not ask why women put up with pain and mistreatment: by the time we reach adulthood, we learn to accept many forms of pain as normal. Rather, we should ask why our society has ignored the prevalence of female pain in our

society so completely as to render it, and the women that experience it, nearly invisible. For thousands of years, across many cultures, men objectively considered women, “the physical, intellectual, and moral inferiors of men,” which lead to the idea that “women must be kept in protective custody, under the control of men.” Sigmund Freud once pondered, “What does a woman want?” Apparently it did not occur to him that he could just ask one. A “sweet gentle girl,” as he referred to his adult wife, could not possibly think or act for herself, or compete in any sort of industry, could she (Buchwald)? Multiple major religions have explicit rules of male domination over women in their scriptures. As societies became more scientific, people began citing biology as well as religion to prove that women belong in a subservient position, asserting that men have a natural instinct to rape and harass, because deep down, the impulse to procreate and spread our genes drives us all (Bancroft).

According to Buchwald, however, “behavioral biology [...] suggests that all human sexual behavior is learned.” Bancroft argues that, given the prevalence of sexist rhetoric in our culture and media, it’s surprising that more men aren’t abusive. “There must not be anything inherently abusive or power-hungry about men, or it would be impossible for so many to refuse to follow the path where their cultural training is propelling them.” This suggests that the gender based power structure does not stem from any sort of truth about the nature of the modern man and woman or their capacities for intelligence, but rather from the nature of humans in general and the kinds of societies and biases they form. Groups of humans have a habit of trying to establish themselves as superior to other groups based on race and nationality as well as gender, and any other qualifier they can think of (Buchwald). Power comes with perks, and to have power, one must establish a hierarchy, valid or not. By repeatedly claiming that women are inherently simple, or fragile, or passive, or wicked, or any other negative adjective, men can convince themselves, as well as women, that women belong in a position subservient to men. This

phenomenon often occurs on a small scale in abusive relationships: the man always spins any conflict in a way that places the woman at fault, and asserts that therefore she deserves abuse, and that her pain cannot be helped. She takes his accusations seriously because even abusive relationships form on a foundation of love and trust, and she does her best to live up to his unreasonable expectations of her (Bancroft). Over time, and after many of these conflicts, an abusive man can wear down his victim's self-esteem to the point where she genuinely feels lucky that he puts up with her at all, and she learns to put her partner's needs completely before her own (Kosof). The men, meanwhile, "become attached to the various privileges they earn through mistreating their partners, and they have habits of mind that make it difficult for them to imagine being in a respectful and equal relationship with a woman (Bancroft)." Apply those same concepts to an entire society, and a lot of the seams that hold an oppressive system together start to show.

The constant onslaughts of slander against womankind functionally manifest themselves as legal barriers for women. Once upon a time, people regarded marriages as transactions more so than romantic commitments. As such, a man legally owned his wife, and could treat her however he saw fit: the phrase "rule of thumb" originates from an English law circa 1768 which stated that a man could legally beat his wife, so long he did not use a stick thicker than his thumb. Laws can change drastically over the course of over 200 years, of course, but men resisted protections for women and treated them as affronts to their own rights the entire time: "In the nineteenth century, when a judge ruled that a man could not imprison and rape his wife, the London Times bemoaned, 'One fine morning last month, marriage in England was suddenly abolished (Buchwald).'" This sentiment stemmed from the fact that "for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years the domestic assault of women has been considered a necessary tool for a man to maintain order and discipline in his home (Bancroft)." Many countries, including the

United States, did not implement any significant laws that protected women from abusive husbands until the 1970s. Even today, men who assault strangers face steeper consequences than those who assault their wives. Bancroft states that the laws designed to protect women did not become “consistently enforced” until the 1990s, but Gordon and Kosof’s analyses of the legal process in regards to rape and domestic assault do not paint a pretty picture of that enforcement.

In the eyes of the court, a crime must have both *actus rea* and *mens rea*, which translate to “action” and “intent,” respectively (Gordon). First, this means that the men denouncing #MeToo because they saw a little too much of themselves in the Aziz Ansari story can officially relax: if they truly did not intend to force themselves on anybody, they are not criminals, they are merely oafs with poor communication skills. Unfortunately it also means that a woman has to prove with hard evidence both the action and intent of the perpetrator in order to receive legal recourse. This explains why women remain wary of men like Ansari: it seems unlikely that a grown man of his social stature cannot tell the difference between a woman who kisses him back and one who doesn’t. Perhaps Grace did not communicate as clearly as she claimed, or perhaps Ansari sees the benefit of playing dumb, but how could anyone prove anything either way? Even in more violent cases, a woman must go to authorities right away, or her bruises, which are her evidence, will fade. A woman trapped in an abusive relationship, even if she wants to leave, might not do so out of fear: abusive spouses tend to get angry when their wives take legal action, so she must perfectly execute her escape. She might get herself a court order, but that does not mean he will obey it. If he finds her, he may very well kill her, so in addition to filing the proper paperwork and finding the money for court fees, she must find a place for herself and her children, if she has them, to hide, all while dealing with the trauma of her assault. For these reasons, over 90% of battered women “never dared call the police (Kosof).”

In a rape case, a victim must also prove intent to rape by proving that they resisted their attacker in a significant fashion. Though “courts have generally accepted that the victim’s submission based upon reasonable fear does not constitute consent, [...] resistance by words alone is insufficient and must be accompanied by acts” if a victim wishes to pursue legal action. This discourages many rape victims from reporting their assaults: many women know they cannot overpower their attackers and think that if they don’t fight back, they can avoid additional injury. The legal process then makes them feel like they did not resist enough. Courts might offer more sympathy to a small woman pressing charges against a large attacker, but in general victims of crimes like burglary and mugging do not experience nearly the same level of interrogation and cross referencing that rape victims do: the victim often feels they are on trial alongside the perpetrator. Most victims would prefer to repress their experience to the best of their ability and return to life as though nothing happened rather than relive their trauma through a long and invasive court case (Gordon).

Even if a victim successfully takes her attacker to trial, the perpetrator faces relatively minimal punishment. In the infamous Brock Turner case, witnesses caught him in the act of raping an unconscious victim, and still he only received a six month jail sentence. Authorities released him after three, and his lawyer still asserts that “what happened is not a crime (Andone).” Turner’s case is not unique: “Almost one quarter of convicted rapists are not sentenced to prison but instead are released on probation (Buchwald).” Men charged with assault and battery of their wives typically serve two to three years, and upon their release they pose a real threat to the women who fought for their imprisonment, as well as the women they form relationships with in the future (Kosof). Our culture often shows more concern for the accused than the victims. “Peoples [sic] lives are being shattered and destroyed by a mere allegation,” tweeted the president (@realDonaldTrump), as if the victims did not also have their

lives shattered and destroyed. Others call the #MeToo movement a “witch hunt (*Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*),” implying that the current wave of sexual assault allegations stems from hysteria and paranoia. Certainly no one deserves to face imprisonment for a crime they did not commit, and even guilty criminals deserve due process, but when this attitude vilifies victims with valid accusations, it excuses real perpetrators. When real perpetrators do not face consequences for their crimes, a negative feedback loop occurs: more and more people start to view those crimes as socially acceptable, and victims feel more and more helpless. Bancroft laments, “When a woman asks me, ‘Why does a physically abusive man believe he can get away with it?’ I have to answer that until very recently he could.”

How can we restore power to the victims of harassment and assault, and women in general? The #MeToo movement has helped tremendously, of course: for too long, predators have hidden in plain sight. In the past, social etiquette decreed that women should not speak about sex at all. Grown women often pretended as if they knew nothing about it. As such, women and girls had no reference for acceptable sexual behavior, or how many other women shared their experiences, enabling abuse. This also meant that men had no reference for women’s perspective, either. In general, men simply do not see the world the way women do, because they do not experience it the way women do. They do not fear things like sharing an otherwise empty elevator with a strange man, going grocery shopping past sunset, or taking their eyes off of their drink at a bar. Buchwald poses the question, “How do we make this enormous shadow on the lives of women visible to the millions of men who are not rapists or molesters or seducers?” Much of women’s torment happens behind their backs: men will not catcall a woman accompanied by another man, at least not while he’s paying attention (Buchwald).

Even as predatory men purposefully hide in the shadows, however, other men tend to see what they want to see. Bancroft insists that he must meet with an abusive man's partner in order to get a clear picture of their situation and effectively counsel the man. He states that "the women's accounts [...] have taught us that abusive men present their own stories with tremendous denial, minimization, and distortion of the history of their behaviors." While the average man may not have a perspective as warped as an abusive one, we all have our biases, and even the average man has become accustomed to certain privileges and learned to conform to certain roles as a man. In regards to the Aziz Ansari story, "We're only comfortable with movements like #MeToo so long as the men in question are absolute monsters we can easily separate from the pack. Once we move past the 'few bad apples' argument and start to suspect that this is more a trend than a blip, our instinct is to normalize. To insist that this is just how men are, and how sex is," states Loofbourow. No man with a good conscience wants to believe that he contributes to the oppression of women, so he fears what he might realize when he reflects on his own interactions with women. He must reflect, however, in order to facilitate real change. In the context of abusers, Bancroft asserts that only the abusers who develop real empathy ever truly change: after all, the change does not benefit them personally. They must admit that they did wrong, and stop making excuses for their behavior. They must learn to recognize the habits of mind that made them abusive and actively work against them. Similarly the average man must remain vigilant in regards to the harmful attitudes and behaviors that society has taught him, not because it benefits him to do so, but because it benefits the people around him and society as a whole. "These are not 'women's issues' -- too long misplaced, trivialized and marginalized as such -- they are human issues that we need to address together (Schnall)."

Unfortunately abusers will rarely make any of those changes on their own. They seek counseling only at the demands of the court or their partners who threaten to leave them for good. Similarly on a large scale, “it has not worked to simply ‘ask’ the male power structure to please change things (Buchwald).” In other words, we cannot have a #MeToo movement and simultaneously excuse confirmed perpetrators. Without tangible change, the words of the movement will ring empty. Gordon urges the public to call upon legislators to bring about legal reform: surely we can find a way to grant the accused due process while acknowledging the unique struggles that the victim of a sexual or domestic crime faces. A legal system that includes space for minor offenses can help women fight back against things we generally just put up with today. Lighter punishments like fines for, say, common street harassment, would facilitate a shift in the way people perceive certain behaviors by holding offenders accountable, without allowing loudmouths to accuse a victim of unnecessarily ruining someone’s life. It would likewise allow for stricter repercussions in cases which more deeply violated the victim. We must also crack down on repercussions for institutions that enable rape and harassment, such as schools and companies which try to handle rape and harassment cases internally, sweeping them under the rug, rather than reporting them to law enforcement. Public schools might receive a cut in funding for such violations, while private institutions might incur a fine (Buchwald).

To see any of this sort of overarching reform in society, we must make the discussion political. Every other marginalized group has raised their position in society by publicly protesting and campaigning for better treatment as a group. In some ways, women have succeeded with this method as well: it’s how we got the right to vote. When it comes to the more intimate and nuanced issues we face today, however, women who speak out face the unique risk of damaging not only their friendly and professional relationships, but their intimate and

family relationships as well. Our fathers, brothers, husbands, and boyfriends all come under scrutiny when we critically examine contemporary gender dynamics, and so we risk alienating them in our fight for a safer world. For this reason, most politicians steer clear of issues like rape and domestic assault in their campaigns: they could drive away half their voter base (Buchwald). Schnall recommends grassroots efforts to bring about legal and political reform. The Women's Marches and #MeToo movement have raised a rallying cry, but now we must channel that energy into a fresh generation of civil servants and elected officials who will actively work to change public policy and grant women the protections they need.

To limit unfounded resistance to these changes, Buchwald, Bancroft, Gordon, and Kosof all agree we must place a focus on educating the public on the history of women's liberation, and the ways patriarchal values remain present in our society today. We can do this through public school curriculum and public service announcements. By teaching people the ways society has changed in the past, we can prove that it is possible to eradicate laws and attitudes that enable the sexual and domestic abuse of women, even if they seem firmly ingrained in our society today. Too often people do nothing because they believe nothing can be done, creating a vicious cycle of hopelessness. They must instead understand the way that power dynamics feed off such hopelessness and elect to disrupt that cycle any way they can. For boys, this means rejecting definitions of masculinity which cite dominance, lack of empathy, and the treatment of women as sexual conquests as pillars of manhood. It means encouraging boys to express themselves outside competitive environments like those found in sports. How many parents show concern when their son shows interest in playing with dolls, or other feminine behaviors? What sort of messages does he receive when he is discouraged from forms of play which practice empathy and nurturing, and instead told to focus on becoming faster and stronger than his peers? "If, in raising boys, we emphasize achievement more than exploration

and competition more than cooperation, we will train them in competitive, goal-directed behavior, including sexual behavior (Buchwald).” We must prevent instilling such values in future generations of men for the sake of future generations of women.

Those future generations of women must also receive different social training than their predecessors. Ideally we would simply have to take extra care to ensure that girls feel that they have the right to speak up and the capability to sustain themselves independently.

Unfortunately, however, even parents that work to cultivate their daughters’ faith in their own voices cannot pretend that the rest of the world will treat them with such respect. For so long, women’s compulsory ignorance and faith that men would treat them right played a vital role in their oppression. Therefore we must equip women with the necessary knowledge of potential forms of disrespect they might run into, whether a colleague dismisses their input, or a romantic partner’s seemingly harmless displays of jealousy in grow into possessiveness and abuse, so she does not get blindsided when she does encounter them. Women cannot simply ignore their own disenfranchisement and expect to lead successful lives, they must learn how to respond to disrespect with dignity and recognize signs of abuse in their relationships. Women do need to hold themselves accountable when they fail to speak up for themselves: yes, it contradicts their social training and no, it is not fair to hold women responsible for their own abuse, but realistically, women will not receive better treatment unless they demand it. We must stand up for ourselves not because we deserve mistreatment if we don’t, but because we deserve basic dignity and respect regardless, even if we have bestow it upon ourselves (Buchwald).

Some argue that we should control and limit production and access to sexist media to convey healthier messages to our children. Certainly women could use more positive role models, and men could do without so many negative ones. As creatives and consumers, we can vocalize our opinions on what kinds of media we would like to see more of and try to send

our money and our creative efforts in those directions. It seems unlikely, however, that any significant shift in commercial media will occur before an equally significant shift in societal values does. Realistically we can only take responsibility for ourselves and our own children. Rather than trying to simply keep children blind and deaf to the world they already live in, we should try teaching kids to be critical of the media they consume: ask children what they think of what they are watching. How are the male and female characters depicted? Do they seem real? Challenge the child to consider how they might react in a similar situation (Buchwald). Though it may sound far-fetched, one high school provided an experimental Porn Literacy class in addition to standard sexual education as a response to the fact that, whether we like it or not, teenagers today can and do view pornography. The school saw great results: at the beginning of the class, 45% of its students believed in porn as “a good way for young people to learn about sex,” and roughly 25% believed pornography was realistic. At the end, those figures dropped to 18% and 0% respectively (Jones). By teaching children to question what they see and to think for themselves, we give them the gift of self-assurance. For boys, this means feeling secure in their masculinity even if they resist the status quo. For girls, this means developing the steel backbone necessary to assert themselves as women.

Even as celebrities walk the red carpet with pins that read “Time’s Up,” it will take more time and significant continued effort on our part to truly eradicate the deep-seated attitudes and societal structures that serve to frighten, devalue, and annoy women. The fact that women finally feel empowered to speak out as much as they already have is a significant step in the right direction, but we must remain vigilant and not allow sexist rhetoric to drown out our voices. We must continue to speak out not only with personal anecdotes, but with a deep understanding of history as well contemporary society. The context for our experiences matters: alone, we are too easily dismissed, but our unified efforts have the power to bring about change. For this

reason I am immensely proud of the efforts of my partners and our film crew. Regardless of the success or quality of our film itself, we chose to band together and to speak up, and we learned valuable practical lessons about doing so. Those lessons, coupled with the influence of movements like the Women's March and #MeToo, give me hope for the bright futures of myself, my classmates, and women as a whole.

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